

Oral history with 53 year old female, British Columbia (Transcription)

<unintelligible text> 21 Tape #4---Side 1---page1---26 February 1976 Begin M29 B(3)

Speaker: I'm <unintelligible text> and I was born March 9,1917. So...

(Where were you born?)

Speaker: I was born up in the Nass Valley. The old old village what they call ((phonetic)) Kit-lac-axtansk. Which they now call New Eiange.. . After the flood they have a new village now. And that's New Eiange. So I come from the Nishga Tribe.

(When did you come down to work in the cananery?)

Speaker: Goodness, my mother always did travel back and forth. Like I said, she worked on nets and she worked for <unintelligible text> so we used to leave up the Nass there a around March and go down to Inverness and she'd start in April so I spent more time on the Skeena River than I did in Nass Valley.

(How did you come down?)

Speaker: Well, In those days when I was a young girl, we used to go by sled. You knpw from eiange we used to use canoes down to wherever the ice would be and then they'd draw these canoes up on the ice and they used dog teaas sometimes you know the

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people would pull and we'd have all our supplies on there and we'd go right down to what they call Fishery Bay. That's the place where they get <olichens?> now you know in those days, they still did at that time and from there we would get a boat. My mother would get a boat to take us down to Kincolith and then we'd stay over night there and she'd hire a boat from Kincolith that would take us to old Arondale Cannery and then from there we would catch either the Caomsen, the Cardena, the Catala down to Prince Rupert or right by Inverness there and that's how they worked it. It was pretty cold in those days too, so that's the way people travelled in those days, as far back as I can remember. I don't know about the early days, before the steamers, I guess then used canoes, but at the time I was growing up that is what we used to do. And then my mother would start around April and work on nets there at Inverness.

(Who owned Inverness?)

Speaker: Well, I couldn't say who owned it. Well they were <unintelligible text> people. They owned the cannery. And before that, I don't know who owned it the place, if I could remember that far back because they did say that somebody did have it before <unintelligible text> until they sold to Canadian Fish.

(Did you used to help your mother?)

Speaker: Well, that is how I learned to work on nets is helping my mother. I used to in those days, they had linen nets and I used to salvage them, you know, put salvage on them and those nets then were oiled and at that time those nets well there were women, Japanese women, whoever lived in the cannery used to take contracts and they'd contract salvaging nets and I can remember I was really young and I used to make my own needles and the cannery crew took pity on me I guess they used to dash up and have their lunch in half an hour and they'd be all there sitting there helps me fill needles and after supper they

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would come down to our house and help me fill needles . I used to have about 50 needles because when your working on contract you know you can't waste time. If you are fst you get more nets you know. If your slow you loose out on nets because there's a lot of people taking contractsin those days.

(What do you mean by filling needles?)

Speaker: They have needles, net needles. You have to fill them with twine that they use to salvage nets you knw, so I used to get a lot of help with that.

(How old were you then?)

Speaker: Oh gosh. Well actually, I must have started when I was nine years old.salvaging but then I still worked, I worked in the cannery when I was ten years of age. I started then.

(Cleaning fish?)

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Speaker: Well, we used to pile cans in trays you know, get cans open, these cans have them ready for the hand fillers and at that time I was getting 15 cents an hour. All hours. There was no overtime pay. It was straight 15 cents an hour and I can remeeremember when the season was over, \$70 I would clear. And that was big money in those days when I was goin'. Of course, like I said, everything was cheap and my mother she used to get \$75 a month. That's net work and then they raised it latter to \$85 and that was the rate of allong the Skeena here. The ones that had more seniority used to get \$85, but then it depended on how fast you worked you know if you were a fast net hanger, why you get

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\$85 a month and the beginners they used to get \$75. It depepded on the net boss. If he thought a person was capable of doing it, then the starting rate was 75. But then that was way before the union.

(Were there a lot of children around your age then?)

Speaker: Oh, yes, there were a lot of them. they used to use children to work, piling cans in trays. It was more or less like play to young kids. As long as they were geting money for it they enjoyed it and then too there was a very bunch of tired little kids like myself but that was money in those days. Theeres quite a difference now. I often tell my children that. At the rate of pay that beginners get whether they know how to do it or not. I think in the earlier days it was harder to get work. You had to know how to do the job and nobody paid for you to learn. You just had to get out there and learn on your own. Now thikngs are a lot differnt as I see it. I don't knowe how other people would see it, but I've lived it and theys how I know. All you have to do know is go to the U.I.C. ...

(Was your father fishing?)

Speaker: No. My father was never a fisherman. He was a bookkeeper so well I didn't see too much, I don't remember too much of my own parents because they both died after I was born so my own mother apparently was a net woman too, but the one that I call mother was the one who acctually brought me up like I more or less called her mother. So in the days when I was growing up, she taught me how to hang nets and a lot of things about net work

(The fishermen would bring their nets in with a big rip in it?)

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Speaker: Yes. On the weekend. And at that time too that was all, there was no overtime straight through All you had to do was dash home have your lunch and then you go back to work again, but now there's a difference... Looking back on it...we were happy. ...you didn't get that much money in the pocket when the season was over...the more we make, the more the, you want to buy and we want to get everything nice for our homes.

(Did anybody have power boats or were there still some people sailing)

Speaker: Oh. At the time I was a child, it was sailboats. And I can remember standing on the dock, it impressed me so much, I often think about it now, how beautiful it was to me. That's through the eyes of a young girl. But just imagine from the Skeena here you see how wide the Skeena is and how far it is and way outside there and I can remember at Inverness we'd see the packer with maybe 12 or 20 sailboats in tow and they'd drift through the river here you know from the canneries up above here...but they had their own flags. We'd all run down by the wharf...I can remember there was an accordion player in one of the boats...you often heard these sailboats, they'd take up their instruments. ...I often think of that. ...all these, they let these sailboats outside...imagine those men...all they had in these sailboats was a tent...it was a tough life...you fished 5 days a week then and they'd all tie up. It was how many fish they'd caught...

(What sort of things would go on on weekends when they were in?)

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Speaker: Well at that time I can remember...they used to hold dances. They never used to go to Rupert, to Prince Rupert on the weekends. ! Port Essington was the town in those days. I can remember 1st of July all the people along the Skeena would go to Port

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Essington...a dance in the old hall there and talking about weekends the men used to on dances...and we used to walk from Inverness on the track, mind you there's no high way...and we'd have a whale of a time and there would be a dance as far as Carlyle or Claxton...the company would run their packer.

(What kind of music was it?)

Speaker: Well, they didn't have jazz in those days. They did have their own jazz...

(What kinds of instruments would they have?)

Speaker: Well, they have the same kinds of instruments that they have today. They had guitars, they had saxophones...but I still like the old songs...You would never go to a dance without an evening gown (??)...I can't remember in those days when there was any conflict between people.

(What did the cannery sound like?)

Speaker: Well for mending nets we have a separate building so there's no sound except when you're pulling the line that's about the only sound there is but working in the cannery, you see I worked both, I started from the cannery of course I worked with my mother helping here in the net loft but then I worked in the cannery, mind you there's a lot of noise in the cannery, steam there and the machinery going clang clang clang so you get all that noise all the time.

(Who worked inside the canneries?)

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Speaker: All women hand filling in those days, though there was more women, course they had lot of men that was pitching fish and the cannery workers that was loodin after the machines and so there was quire a few people working in the cannies but then there was more work. See now there's less work. Every year this conservation allong the Skeena...fishermen were out five days a week.

(Can you remember some real big runs?)

Oh yes I can remember but I wouldn't say exactly what year. But in those days when I was working in the cannery I thought there was big runs every year because there seemed to be no end to it. Half of the times you used to work til one and two o'clock in the morning and that was every day. Sometimes you worked on sundays if their was that much fish asnd there was no conservation in those days yet there was a lot of fish.

(Would you go back to the Nass every winter?)

Speaker: Well, you mean my own holm town? Well they don'thave it anymore after the flood... But no, I don't think I would want to go back...I do go back to visit...

(How 'bout in the 20as and 30s?)

Speaker: Well, I did every year because I worked down here...Next week hering startrs... always go home, then when fishing starts they come back down again....

(Whart time of year would you pack up and go home...?)

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Well at that time I used to go home around October. and spend the winter up there but I don't think I'd do it anymore.

(Did the same people, did a lot of people from your village come down and work at this cannery, I mean, Inverness?)

Speaker: No, they're scattered all over. You see there's North Pacific Cannery. In those days it used to be ABC, belonged to ABC and Co. and then Sunnyside Cannery and then Casiar Cannery so you see people worked for different companies. As soon as I get word from them...Oh there's a lot of them that come from the Skeena here and the Nass, Kincolith, Port Simpson...All the areas from the Skeena here...

(Were there Chinese people from Vancouver?)

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Speaker: Oh yes, yes there were a lot of Chinese. You don't see them anymore. That's all gone and done with. Automation has taken over.

(What parts of the cannery did they work in?)

Speaker: Well mostly they worked in the cannery. They pitched fish. They did all sorts of things. They were actually the main people who did everything in the cannery, that's besides the mechanics and the engineers.

(They were all white?)

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Speaker: Yes well mostly. The mechanics and the engineers were all white. The Japanese like the natives they were fishermen and canneryworkers , Japanese women.

(Where there Chinese men and women?)

Speaker: Just the men. M...Mostly Japanese women. They workde in the cnaneries. But not the Chinese women. I often used to wonder why they never did come to the cnaneries to work. ANd I'm talkin'about the days when I was growing up.

(Did you have much in common with them?)

Speaker: The Chinese? Well of course, we worked with them. That's just what I was sayin'earlier...you had to learn to get along with people. ... I nknow theres a lot of descrimination...Far more so in those days when I was growing up. Then today there's still descrimination now but in a subtle way. In those days the native people just took whatever was given to them and that was it. They were more or less quite about it. They wouldn't fight accept because if they did try to fight back they'd say "okay there's the door". So its more or less you just have to take it...but not any more.-.becaude the fisherman's union came in... that';swhy...all the people...there are some tat would say that the union is this or the union is that, but that isn't so. If you have to work under certain conditions where ther's wo many different r races and there's discrimmination there you've gotta have somebody to look after things asnd that's what the union did...they stomped out that descrimination. ...Under thair constitution there will be no discrimination...so I say that it is a lot better today that in was in the earlier days.

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